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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

October 31, 1952

SUBJECT: (1) French desire for three-power talks in Paris in December;
(2) French position in North Africa.

PARTICIPANTS: Ambassador Bonnet, French Embassy
The Acting Secretary
Mr. van Lacthem, French Embassy
Mr. Utter, AF
Mr. McBride, NE

COPIES TO: New York for the Secretary
The Acting Secretary
G - Mr. Matthews
EUR - Mr. Perkins
Mr. Bonsright
Mr. Williamson
UNA - Mr. Hickerson
Mr. Sandifer
NEA - Mr. Ravndal
Mr. Jernegan
S/P - Mr. Ferguson
WE - Mr. Knight
Mr. Byington (New York)
UNP - Mr. Wainhouse
Mr. Ewing
AF - Mr. Utter
Mr. Richey
RA - Mr. Parsons
EE - Mr. Barbour
BNA - Mr. Rayner
PSA - Mr. Bonsal
NE - Mr. Hart
Embassy, Paris
Embassy, London
Embassy, Belgrade
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Consulate Rabat
Consulate General, Casablanca
Legation, Tangier
Consulate General, Algiers
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Ambassador Bonnet stated that the first subject he had to bring up was an instruction which he had received from the Foreign Office to inform the Department that the French would like to hold three-power talks with the British and ourselves in Paris at the time of the NATO meeting in December. The subjects which the French wanted to discuss were: (1) political talks on Southeast Asia to supplement military talks which recently concluded in Washington; (2) the Near Eastern situation with special

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special reference to the Middle East Defense Organization; (3) strategic problems involving Yugoslavia. In this last connection, the Ambassador said he realized the forthcoming military talks would have been completed by the time of the Paris meeting, and that his Government felt there should then be a three-power meeting to discuss the results of our talks with the Yugoslavs. He said that since the three powers had the principal responsibility in all of these areas, such talks were logical. He said that Mr. Pleven was especially anxious to hold these conversations, and that Schuman would undoubtedly discuss this project further with the Secretary in New York after his arrival on the 7th.

The French Ambassador then passed to a lengthy and essentially repetitious exposé of the French position on the North African problem in the UN. He had received an hour before a copy of the letter which Ambassador Dunn had delivered to Schuman on this subject a few hours before. He said that his reaction to this communication was of course purely personal, but that he felt it did not clear up all of the misunderstandings which existed between us on this question. He said the point which gave France the most hope in the letter was the Secretary's indication that he would participate in this debate personally should the need therefor become apparent. He thought that the paragraph which quoted from the Secretary's speech at the opening of the UN Session in New York on October 15 was unfortunate since it spoke of the UN as potentially helpful in reaching an "accommodation" between France and the North Africa Protectorates. He said that in fact the French position was that UN interest in the matter was making it impossible to reach a settlement. He said that he also regretted to see that a complete divergence in views existed between France and the US on the competence question, and that he still hoped that the US would change its views as expressed in this letter.

I said that the US decision on competence had been taken after exhaustive legal discussion, and that our lawyers were unanimous in believing that the UN was competent to take up the Moroccan and Tunisian questions. I added that we hoped there would be no vote on the competence question, but that if such a ballot were taken on this question, we would have to vote in the affirmative, on legal grounds. Ambassador Bonnet said that in these circumstances he also hoped that a vote on the competence question could be avoided. Ambassador Bonnet added that the French have different legal views from ours on this question, and furthermore felt that its political importance should override purely juridical considerations. He concluded on this subject saying that he knew Foreign Minister Schuman still hoped that the US would change its views on competence.

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Ambassador Bonnet said that the vote of Ambassador Gross on the order of the Tunisian and Moroccan items on the UN agenda had been disappointing and discouraging to France. He added it was especially harmful because of the effect it might have on the Latin American delegations, who would now feel that France was no longer receiving the support of the US.

I said that in our view the essential problem in this debate was for France to make a good, strong and full presentation of the French case in North Africa. I added that if France were silent or left the UN Session on technical grounds, such as a fight over the competence issue, it would put the Secretary in an extremely difficult position since he would have nothing to support if he wished to help the French. Ambassador Bonnet said that he knew that Mr. Schuman wanted and intended to make a full presentation of the French case, and above all to be the first speaker in the debate. He said he hoped the US would favor France's desire to speak first. I stressed again that if the US were going to support the French case on the substance of the issue, we must have something to which to pin this support. Accordingly, we would wish Mr. Schuman to lead off the debate, and the Secretary's statement must in any event follow the French speech. Ambassador Bonnet repeated that Schuman would of course include France's well-known views on the competence question.

He then passed to the question of Tunisian and Moroccan representation in the debate and most forcefully requested US support in opposing all forms of such representation. He said that if this question is debated following Schuman's speech, the French would oppose any hearing for Tunisians and Moroccans. He said his Government was above all opposed to having representatives of the Bey or the Sultan invited since under the Treaty arrangements between France and the Protectorates, the former was charged with handling all foreign relations of Tunisia and Morocco. Ambassador Bonnet stated that M. Hoppenot had been told by Mr. Hickerson that we would oppose inviting representatives other than those of the Bey and the Sultan. He said that for the reasons given above France unfortunately could not accept having delegates of the North African sovereigns present. He added that it would be impossible to have a representative of the Bey of Tunis, for example, for the further reason that France would not be present during any such debate, and it would of course be out of the question to participate therein through a Tunisian appointed by the Bey. Therefore he concluded that the only situation which would arise in the UN would be an Arab-Asian move to hear Salah ben Youssef, for instance, and he

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assumed that we would vote against such a move. Mr. Utter suggested the possibility of not hearing the North African representatives in person but rather of having them submit to the Secretary General their views in writing. The Ambassador said that these people were of course at liberty to submit anything they wanted in writing, but that France would certainly oppose any move to have documents submitted by them read officially by the President of the Committee.

In reviewing the French position, Ambassador Bonnet said that France would not argue the competence question, but Mr. Schuman would have to declare that France did not admit UN competence. In view of the US position, he felt it certain there would be sufficient votes to declare the General Assembly competent. France would make it clear that she could accept no resolution of any kind on either of the North African questions. Schuman would make a single, full presentation after which France would not participate further in the debate. He said there was no question of any change in this basic French position because Pinay had made a commitment in this sense to the Assembly, which he neither could nor would violate.

In conclusion, the Ambassador expressed his views again that France was heading to a showdown with the UN because it was the conviction of the French people that the UN and the French Union had diametrically opposite objectives in many fields, and that France would in no circumstances abandon the French Union concept. He mentioned in this connection the "insufferable" situation which M. Pignon had to put up with in the Trusteeship Council and in the Special Committee. He alleged that nationalism was being created in French West Africa and French Equatorial Africa by the UN, and that the French people were coming to recognize that there was irreconcilable conflict between the basic policies of France and the tendencies of the UN.

In closing I reiterated that the better the French statement by Mr. Schuman, the easier it would be for us to support France. I said that the fullness of our presentation depended largely on the French statement, since we could of course not go further into details than the French did, inasmuch as they were the primarily interested party. I remarked to the Ambassador that we believed we were wise not to have made any public statement on this question during the past few months since such a declaration would have inhibited the Secretary in presenting our case and would have tied our hands, whereas we were now entirely free to aid France in every appropriate respect.

David K. E. Bruce

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